

□ ... that since 2009, Switzerland has banned the construction of minarets?

In November 2009, Swiss voters and cantons approved a popular initiative to amend the Swiss federal constitution to ban the future construction of minarets. The amendment added a new sub-article (3) to Article 72 (Church and State) stating that “The building of minarets is prohibited.” The four minarets that existed in the country at the time of the ban were not affected. The ban does not affect the future building of mosques, though they still are subject to existing local zoning requirements.

In Switzerland’s system of direct democracy, citizens have the power to propose and require a popular vote on initiatives to amend the Swiss federal constitution by collecting the signatures of 100,000 voters supporting a particular initiative within a period of 18 months. The minaret ban was proposed in 2007 by two far-right political parties that argued it was needed to stop the alleged “Islamization” of the country. They had collected the requisite number of signatures by July 2008.

The Swiss government opposed the ban as irreconcilable with human rights guarantees included in the European Convention on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as provisions of the Swiss constitution, and recommended that it should be rejected. Despite this opposition, the minaret initiative was adopted by 57.5% of voters and 22 of the 26 cantons on November 29, 2009. The results surprised many observers, as pre-election polling had indicated that support for the initiative was only about 35%. No other

European country has a constitutional provision or national law banning minarets.

Cases concerning the Swiss minaret ban have been filed at the European Court of Human Rights; one was found inadmissible in 2011 and others remain pending.

To read USCIRF's press release after the minaret ban was adopted, click [here](#) .